

Gibbons Seeks Group To Watchdog the CIA

We're pleased to learn this district's congressman, Rep Sam Gibbons, is stepping up efforts to obtain passage of legislation to establish a 14-member congressional "watchdog committee" over the Central Intelligence Agency and other U. S. intelligence activities.

Representative Gibbons introduced a resolution to that effect in the first session of the 88th Congress. It did not reach the House floor for debate and vote. He has now urged House Rules Committee members to expedite its passage "for the good of the national interest."

Certainly, the proposal is in the national interest and, in our judgment, merits prompt approval.

The Central Intelligence Agency is perhaps the hushiest of the hush-hush operations into which the cold war has pushed the U.S. government. On the information which the CIA develops by a variety of methods, much of the conduct of our policy rests.

Security in these operations is more important, to be sure. Yet these operations are financed by Congress. And Congress, which is to say the public, has in our constitutional system a right to know at least in large outline what the executive branch does with the money Congress provides.

An institution like the CIA should be solely a body to gather intelligence, to weigh it, interpret it if required; but not to make policy decisions. It was never intended to make policy, which in the field of foreign affairs is the prerogative of the President working through the State Department.

But as Representative Gibbons points out, and correctly so, the agency "has taken on the appearance of a policy-making arm of our government, has frustrated other government operations, and has, in some areas, placed our foreign policy objectives in jeopardy."

We urge him to keep pushing for passage of his measure. There is every reason to believe a joint watchdog committee could serve a highly proper and most useful function without violating security, in much the same way the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy has done in an equally secret field for years.

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